**Mao Zedong**

Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung), the son of a peasant farmer, was born in Chaochan, China, in 1893. He became a Marxist while working as a library assistant at Peking University and served in the revolutionary army during the 1911 Chinese Revolution.

Inspired by the Russian Revolution the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established in Shanghai by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao in June 1921. Early members included Mao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Lin Biao. Following instructions from the Comintern members also joined the Kuomintang.

Over the next few years Mao, Zhu De and Zhou Enlai adapted the ideas of Lenin who had successfully achieved a revolution in Russia. They argued that in Asia it was important to concentrate on the countryside rather than the towns, in order to create a revolutionary elite.

Mao worked as a Kuomintang political organizer in Shanghai. With the help of advisers from the Soviet Union the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) gradually increased its power in China. Its leader, Sun Yat-sen died on 12th March 1925. Chiang Kai-Shek emerged as the new leader of the Kuomintang. He now carried out a purge that eliminated the communists from the organization. Those communists who survived managed to established the Jiangxi Soviet.

The nationalists now imposed a blockade and Mao Zedong decided to evacuate the area and establish a new stronghold in the north-west of China. In October 1934 Mao, Lin Biao, Zhu De, and some 100,000 men and their dependents headed west through mountainous areas.

The marchers experienced terrible hardships. The most notable passages included the crossing of the suspension bridge over a deep gorge at Luting (May, 1935), travelling over the Tahsueh Shan mountains (August, 1935) and the swampland of Sikang (September, 1935).

The marchers covered about fifty miles a day and reached Shensi on 20th October 1935. It is estimated that only around 30,000 survived the 8,000-mile Long March.

When the Japanese Army invaded the heartland of China in 1937, Chiang Kai-Shek was forced to move his capital from Nanking to Chungking. He lost control of the coastal regions and most of the major cities to Japan. In an effort to beat the Japanese he agreed to collaborate with Mao Zedong and his communist army.

During the Second World War Mao's well-organized guerrilla forces were well led by Zhu De and Lin Biao. As soon as the Japanese surrendered, Communist forces began a war against the Nationalists led by Chaing Kai-Shek. The communists gradually gained control of the country and on 1st October, 1949, Mao announced the establishment of People's Republic of China.

In 1958 Mao announced the Great Leap Forward, an attempt to increase agricultural and industrial production. This reform programme included the establishment of large agricultural communes containing as many as 75,000 people. The communes ran their own collective farms and factories. Each family received a share of the profits and also had a small private plot of land. However, three years of floods and bad harvests severely damaged levels of production. The scheme was also hurt by the decision of the Soviet Union to withdraw its large number of technical experts working in the country. In 1962 Mao's reform programme came to an end and the country resorted to a more traditional form of economic production.



As a result of the failure on the Great Leap Forward, Mao retired from the post of chairman of the People's Republic of China. His place as head of state was taken by Liu Shaoqi. Mao remained important in determining overall policy. In the early 1960s Mao became highly critical of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. He was for example appalled by the way Nikita Khrushchev backed down over the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Mao became openly involved in politics in 1966 when with Lin Biao he initiated the Cultural Revolution. On 3rd September, 1966, Lin Biao made a speech where he urged pupils in schools and colleges to criticize those party officials who had been influenced by the ideas of Nikita Khrushchev.

Mao was concerned by those party leaders such as Liu Shaoqi, who favoured the introduction of piecework, greater wage differentials and measures that sought to undermine collective farms and factories. In an attempt to dislodge those in power who favoured the Soviet model of communism, Mao galvanized students and young workers as his Red Guards to attack revisionists in the party. Mao told them the revolution was in danger and that they must do all they could to stop the emergence of a privileged class in China. He argued this is what had happened in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev.

Lin Biao compiled some of Mao's writings into the handbook, The Quotations of Chairman Mao, and arranged for a copy of what became known as the Little Red Book, to every Chinese citizen.

Zhou Enlai at first gave his support to the campaign but became concerned when fighting broke out between the Red Guards and the revisionists. In order to achieve peace at the end of 1966 he called for an end to these attacks on party officials. Mao remained in control of the Cultural Revolution and with the support of the army was able to oust the revisionists.

The Cultural Revolution came to an end when Liu Shaoqi resigned from all his posts on 13th October 1968. Lin Biao now became Mao's designated successor.

Mao now gave his support to the Gang of Four: Jiang Qing (Mao's fourth wife), Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan and Zhange Chungqiao. These four radicals occupied powerful positions in the Politburo after the Tenth Party Congress of 1973.

Mao Zedong died in Beijing on 9th September, 1976.

**Interviews with Historians**

**Mao Zedong, interviewed by Edgar Snow in Red Star Over China (1936)**

My father had had two years of schooling and he could read enough to keep books. My mother was wholly illiterate. Both were from peasant families. I was the family 'scholar.' I knew the Classics, but disliked them. What I enjoyed were the romances of old China, and especially stories of rebellions. I read the Yue Fei Zhuan (Jing Zhong Zhuan), Shui Hu Zhuan, Fan Tang, San Guo, and Xi You, while still very young, and despite the vigilance of my old teacher, who hated these outlawed books and called them wicked. I used to read them in school, covering them up with a Classic when the teacher walked past. So also did most of my schoolmates. We learned many of the stories almost by heart, and discussed and re-discussed them many times. We knew more of them than the old men of the village, who also loved them and used to exchange stories with us. I believe that perhaps I was much influenced by such books, read at an impressionable age.

I finally left the primary school when I was thirteen and began to work long hours on the farm, helping the hired labourer, doing the full labour of a man during the day and at night keeping books for my father. Nevertheless, I succeeded in continuing my reading, devouring everything I could find except the Classics. This annoyed my father, who wanted me to master the Classics, especially after he was defeated in a lawsuit due to an apt Classical quotation used by his adversary in the Chinese court. I used to cover up the window of my room late at night so that my father would not see the light.

My father was in his early days, and in middle age, a sceptic, but my mother devoutly worshipped Buddha. She gave her children religious instruction, and we were all saddened that our father was an unbeliever. When I was nine years old I seriously discussed the problem of my father's lack of piety with my mother. We made many attempts then and later on to convert him, but without success. He only cursed us and, overwhelmed by his attacks, we withdrew to devise new plans. But he would have nothing to do with the gods.

My reading gradually began to influence me, however; I myself became more and more sceptical. My mother became concerned about me, and scolded me for my indifference to the requirements of the faith, but my father made no comment. Then one day he went out on the road to collect some money, and on his way he met a tiger. The tiger was surprised at the encounter and fled at once, but my father was even more astonished and afterwards reflected a good deal on his miraculous escape. He began to wonder if he had not offended the gods. From then on he showed more respect to Buddhism and burned incense now and then. Yet, when my own backsliding grew worse, the old man did not interfere. He only prayed to the gods when he was in difficulties.

In the winter of 1920, I organized workers politically, for the first time, and began to be guided in this by the influence of Marxist theory and the history of the Russian Revolution. During my second visit to Beijing I had read much about the events in Russia, and had eagerly sought out what little Communist literature was then available in Chinese. Three books especially deeply carved my mind, and built up in me a faith in Marxism, from which, once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver. These books were the Communist Manifesto, translated by Chen Wangdao, and the first Marxist book ever published in Chinese; Class Struggle, by Kautsky; and a History of Socialism, by Kirkupp. By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from this time on I considered myself a Marxist.

**Su Kaiming, Modern China (1985)**

To help artists and writers find some answers, the Communist Party in May 1942 held a forum on literature and art in Yan'an. Mao Zedong spoke twice at this historic meeting, in part summing up the thinking of the most progressive artists and setting forth conclusions reached through discussion and argument. He reminded artists that they had a very important role to play in the ongoing struggle. The revolution needed armed forces to fight the battle of the sword, but that was not enough. The revolution also needed a cultural army - fighters armed with pens - to educate and unite the people and promote the liberation of the country.

To accomplish this task, writers and artists must first shift their class stand and become one with the masses, seeing things from their viewpoint. No artist can write convincingly of what he doesn't know. "China's revolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise," he said, "must go among the masses ... in order to observe, experience, study and analyze all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art." They must also learn the language of the masses. Only then can they proceed to do creative work.

**Qi Wen, China (1979)**

At that time (1931) Wang Ming, who had assumed leadership of the Party Central Committee, pursued his policy of "Left" adventurism, causing great losses to the revolutionary forces: The Red Army soldiers were reduced from 300,000 to 30,000 and Communist Party members from 300,000 to about 40,000. Under these, circumstances, the Red Army had to move out. In October, 1934, it began its world-famous Long March from Jiangxi.

In January 1935, the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee held an enlarged meeting at Zunyi in Guizhou Province. Militarily and organizationally it rectified Wang Ming's "Left" adventurist line and established Mao Zedong's leadership over the whole Party. From then on, the Chinese revolution advanced along a victorious road. In October 1935, the Red Army triumphantly arrived at the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. Later it smashed the encirclement campaigns of Chiang Kai-shek. As the Chinese Communist Party fought for the establishment of a national united front against Japanese imperialist aggression, it established its base in the northern Shaanxi city of Yan'an.

**Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong (1978)**

During the Great Revolution, Chairman Mao was already aware that the peasants were the largest ally and that the people's revolution could not triumph without them. And sure enough, the revolution suffered defeat because his views weren't listened to. Later, when we got to the countryside. Chairman Mao saw that in order to carry out the revolution it is necessary not only to rely on the peasants, but also to win over the middle and petty bourgeoisie. As Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary treachery became further exposed, only the comprador-bureaucrat and feudal landlord classes supported him. But a group of people inside the Communist Party made "Left" deviationist mistakes and were very narrow in their outlook, holding that the middle and petty bourgeoisie were unreliable. They didn't listen to Chairman Mao, and the result was that the revolution suffered another setback and we had to march 25,000 li. Then Chairman Mao proposed that we unite with Chiang Kai-shek and other members of the upper strata to resist Japanese aggression. But some people said that if we wanted unity, there shouldn't be any struggle. Chairman Mao replied that Chiang and the others were our domestic enemy; we were uniting with them in order to fight the national enemy. But they were not reliable partners or allies, and we must guard against them; otherwise, they might turn on us. We took measures to avert Right deviations and to prevent unqualified compromises. During the present War of Liberation, "Left" deviationist mistakes were made in agrarian reform in the countryside. In order to eliminate the landlord class, landlords were given poor land or no land at all so that they could not eke out a living; or too many people were classified as feudal rich peasants or landlords. Moreover, on the question of executions, it was stipulated that no one should be executed except for those who had committed serious crimes, refused to mend their ways' and were bitterly hated by the people. But, sometimes, when the people were filled with wrath, these distinctions were not made, and the leadership did not attempt to persuade the masses, so too many people were put to death. This had an adverse effect on our united front with the peasantry, and particularly with the middle peasants. This mistake was also corrected by Chairman Mao.

**Deng Xiaoping, Mao Zedong Thought (1978)**

Comrade Mao Zedong wrote a four-word motto for the Central Party School in Yanan: "Seek truth from facts." These four words are the quintessence of Mao Zedong Thought. In the final analysis, Comrade Mao's greatness and his success in guiding the Chinese revolution to victory rest on just this approach. Marx and Lenin never mentioned the encirclement of the cities from the countryside - a strategic principle that had not been formulated anywhere in the world in their lifetime. Nonetheless, Comrade Mao Zedong pointed it out as the specific road for the revolution in China's concrete conditions. At a time when the country was split up into separatist warlord domains, he led the people in the fight to establish revolutionary bases in areas where the enemy's control was weak, to encircle the cities from the countryside and ultimately to seize political power. Just as the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin made its revolution at a weak link in the chain of the imperialist world, we made our revolution in areas where the enemy was weak. In principle, the two courses were the same. But instead of trying to take the cities first, we began with the rural areas, then gradually encircled the cities. If we had not applied the fundamental principle of seeking truth from facts, how could we have raised and solved this problem of strategy?

**Chen Changfeng was Mao Zedong's orderly. He wrote an account of Mao Zedong and the Long March in 1973**.

A comrade named Wu took me to the Commissar. He lived in a typical Jiangxi wooden house with two rooms, one a bedroom and the other an office. We entered through the bedroom. In it was an ordinary wooden bed covered with a cotton sheet. It didn't even have a pillow. I grew less nervous. Judging from the room, the Commissar must be living as simply as all of us, I thought. Two men were talking together in the office. Comrade Wu indicated the man in the chair and whispered: "That's Commissar Mao." I looked at him curiously. His grey uniform was the same as ours. The only difference was that the pockets on his coat seemed to be especially large. His black hair contrasted sharply with his fair complexion. Maybe he was a bit too thin. His eyes seemed to be very big and keen. He seemed to be about forty at most. Talking to a man opposite him, he gesticulated with his hands; his voice was gentle. Although I didn't understand what he was talking about, I felt he was very sincere.

Commissar Mao's life was very simple and I soon got to know his habits. His personal possessions included only two blankets, one cotton sheet, two grey uniforms, just as we privates wore, a worn overcoat, and one grey woollen sweater. Then he had a broken umbrella, a bowl for eating and a knapsack with nine compartments for his maps, documents and books. When we were campaigning or on the march, he carried the knapsack and umbrella himself. I would carry the rest. When we came to our camp site, I would find two wooden boards, put them together and spread the blankets and sheet on them, folding up his uniforms to make a pillow. This was his bed.

He slept very little. We had a small lamp; during the march this was used as a torch to light the way, but when in camp it was set on a brick or stone for use in his office. After supper he would light this lamp, open up his knapsack and take out his maps, documents and books, papers, and writing brush and sometimes work till dawn.

**Anna Louise Strong, An Interview With Chairman Mao Zedong (1960)**

I raised the question about the threat of war between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The Chairman said that the talk of war was at present largely a smoke-screen which the reactionaries created to cover up the many immediate contradictions facing U.S. imperialism. American monopoly capital of course dreamed of destroying the U.S.S.R. but this aim was not so immediate. They must first wear down the American people's opposition to war, and then they must bring other capitalist countries under American control. Any war against the U.S.S.R. had to be done through other countries' territory, through Britain, France and China. So the American reactionaries used all this talk about fighting the U.S.S.R. to give excuse for attacking the American people's civil rights and living standards and for bringing the other capitalist lands under American control. He pointed out how, under this pretext, the U.S.A. was setting up military bases in many places and had already taken a very large area under American control.

Chairman Mao laughingly illustrated his point with the tea-cups and little white wine cups on the table, placing a big cup for American imperialism and surrounding it with a circle of little wine cups for the American people, with a long zigzag line filled up with match-boxes and cigarettes to represent other countries all separating American imperialism from the Soviet Union, a big cup at the other side. The cooperation of the people, he said, was strong enough, if properly aroused, to prevent a third world war. But this cooperation against world war must be aroused, otherwise the war would come.

The metaphor of "paper-tiger" was used during this talk and I was especially impressed, not only by the metaphor but by the way in which Chairman Mao, without knowing English, was able to correct the exact translation of his words. When he first said that reactionary rulers are paper-tigers, the word-was translated "scare-crow." Chairman Mao immediately stopped the talk and asked me to tell him just what a "scarecrow" is. When I replied that it is a figure like a man which peasants put up in a field to scare away crows, he at once expressed dissatisfaction, and said that this was not his meaning. A paper tiger, he said, is not something dead to scare crows. It scares children. It looks like a terrible tiger but actually, being made of pressed paper, it softens when damp and is washed away in a heavy rain.

After this Chairman Mao used the "paper-tiger" in English, laughing at the sound of English words in a sentence, the rest of which was Chinese. Before the February Revolution in Russia, he said, the tsar looked very strong and terrible. But a February rain washed him away. Hitler also was washed away by the storms of history. So were the Japanese imperialists. They were paper-tigers all. The same thing would happen to all imperialists and reactionaries. Their strength lay only in the unconsciousness of the people. The consciousness of the people is the basic question. Not explosives of atom bombs but the man who handles them. He is still to be educated. After a moment, he added: Communist Parties have real power, because they awaken the people's consciousness.